

HOME LIFE OF THE ELITE

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175 family and to make only "sensible" marriages, was a fact rarely
581 glimpsed by the critics. A good example of their attitude is the state-
588 ment of the pious English Quaker, John Candler, in 1841:

[114] But few of the merchants or principal inhabitants are married men: con-
cubinage is common, and unhappily regarded as not dishonorable. When-
ever a ball is given, or a large party invited, the invitation is equally ex-
tended to "Monsieur and Madame ——" or to "Monsieur ——" and his
lady"; and by this compounding of moral distinctions among the upper
classes, the evil descends to the lower ranks and becomes perpetuated.³

• [163] And later Candler accuses Haitian mothers of being "utterly dead to
all moral considerations," because they do not take pains to instill
(middle-class English) ideals of morality, or teach the young the
evils of "wayward passion."

175 Not even Haitian authors were willing to accept plaçage as a
114 desirable practice. Beaubrun Ardouin explained that the color preju-
581 dice of colonial times was responsible for what he clearly considered
588 an evil: "The aristocracy of skin" made plaçage prevail over "divine
592 law," for whites would not often in colonial times marry colored
women. The same prejudice in the republic kept light-colored men
from marrying darker women, but not from living with them.
Ardouin believed that Haiti would gain infinitely by adopting "*les
bonnes moeurs*," not on moral grounds, but for practical reasons.
With regular marriage, he says, there would result a greater fixity
of the conjugal state and more confidence on the part of the women,
"who too often discover that they are only the satisfaction of a
whim"; also the men would reflect more upon the consequence of
an infidelity which, in dividing families, might separate children
from father or mother and so greatly weaken the delicate relations of
paternal love and filial piety. Still another consideration was political:
the dispersion which resulted in the inheritance of property when
many mothers and children compete. Because of plaçage unions,
quite a number of estates had been reduced to almost nothing.

175 As the century progressed, the custom of plaçage prevailed from
581 the President down to the humblest peasant. The women of the
588 President were visited publicly by him; sometimes he was accom-
643 panied on his visits by a staff or selected officers of state. The critical

3. *Brief Notices of Hayti*, pp. 24, 25.

4. *La Géographie de l'île d'Haïti*, pp. 181, 96 ff.

OUTER ASPECTS OF HAITI

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499 mind dust, rust, and a steady succession of bumps. To travel in the
 [49] average hired car, driven by a Haitian, is one of the grim experiences
 of life. The driver speeds as if pursued by a demon, while the peasant
 pedestrians leap for safety into the ditches; the unfortunate passenger
 is moved to close his eyes to avoid seeing the inevitable crash which
 [36] does not come. The most comfortable means of travel if one is going
 only to towns is by ship, for practically all of Haiti's towns are
 seaports.

162 To know the towns is still not to know Haiti, however, for two
 577 million or more Haitians live in the rural regions. These are the
 people. And if they are ignorant and not too clean, they are neverthe-
 less models of kindly generosity. It is the proud boast even of the
 élite that one may travel the length and breadth of the land in perfect
 safety, in no danger of life or of personal property.

105 Many homely sights linger in the mind: women washing the
 family clothes in the stream, laughing and gossiping with their
 neighbors; men and women talking in animated fashion to them-
 selves, arguing, cajoling, explaining as they walk along; individuals
 carrying a single flower, simply because it is beautiful; barefoot
 women, gnarled of hand and lined of face, kneeling in the Catholic
 church at prayer; taxi drivers who cruise by, hining in order to
 attract the attention of a visitor who obviously can afford to ride
 instead of walk; an apparently ceaseless procession of patient donkeys,
 always laden, sometimes ridden by women, sometimes urged along
 from behind; the so-called buses each with its witty or its florid
 name (Plaisance, Éclair, Grâce-à-Dieu, Polichinelle, Sauve-qui-peut,
 Montparnasse), which like glorified buckboards jostle woodenly
 from the town to country hamlets; the winsome, open smile and
 gay laughter of a peasant boy; the ingratiating charm of a sleeping
 baby in the noise of the market place. To know the average Haitian
 is to feel a warm affection for him. His life is never easy, yet he bears
 it all with true beauty of spirit. If *le bon Dieu* sends distress, he will
 also make it possible for distress to be borne.

576 The people are polite, whether to each other or to strangers. A
 younger person greets an older one as *compère* or *commère*—literally,
 godfather or godmother; to his equal he says "*frère*" or "*m'sieu*."

• [367] Sometimes one sees a local patriarch instructing little children in
 [60] "deportment." This courtesy extends to hospitality: a stranger is
 almost sure to be offered shelter and food wherever he stops.